Gender Pluralist Theory: How useful is it in supporting the health of transgender people?

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Introduction

- Shift overall to some recognition of the diversities within the ‘trans’ umbrella
- Paper aims to look at gender pluralist theory as one way of conceptualising this and informing healthcare developments
- Caveat – paper is about trans not intersex per se – as the issues are different – but intersex included to a degree as some shared agendas e.g. bodily autonomy, self-determination, de-stigmatization of bodily variation

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Structure

- Methods
- Gender Pluralist Theory
- Community, Activism, Diversities
- Legislation, Human Rights, Policies
- Healthcare and Gender Pluralism
- Conclusion:
  - Is Gender Pluralism useful?
  - How do current developments inform/expand gender pluralist theory?

Methods

The original UK 1990s study by Monro (Monro 2000, 2005, 2007 etc)

- 26 interviews with a range of trans and intersex people based in the UK

The FRA Studies (2013, 2014, 2016)

- 2016 study: 46 interviews with professionals with a trans health remit in 19 EU Member States

The Norwegian study (Van der Ros 2013a; 2017)

- 19 interviews with trans people (binary and non-binary)

The Intersex and Human Rights Study (current)

- Qualitative research in the UK, Italy and Switzerland with Zwischengeshclecht and other Intersex organisations (17 interviews so far)

Gender Pluralist Theory

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- ‘Expansion of male/female categories’: ‘male’ and ‘female’ are stretched to include (some) gender variant people

- ‘Moving beyond gender’ – degenders society as far as possible and includes people identifying as non-male/non-female

- Gender Pluralism: Sex and gender seen as a set of spectra/continua

✓ Includes people who have fluid genders, multiply-gendered people, androgynes, non binary people, gender independent people, transsexual men and women, cis men and women, and all others regardless of their gender/sexed characteristics

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Community, Activism, Diversities

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- Social shift towards some level of gender pluralism
  - Online communities e.g. http:genderfork.com
  - Growth of non-binary communities in countries such as the UK and USA
  - Non-binary is being taken up by some feminist and other movements across the EU
  - Some organisations in the UK are adding the option to select gender neutral titles to their systems. See for example: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-39444432

The diverse groups known as non-binary or gender-queer include '…people [who] have a gender which is neither male nor female and may identify as both male and female at one time, as different genders at different times, as no gender at all, or dispute the very idea of only two genders' (Richards et al 2016: 95)

Legislation, Human Rights and Policies

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- Many human rights frameworks e.g.:

  - Article 35 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states that individuals are entitled to healthcare, and a high level of human health protection (2000/C 364/01).
  - Council of Europe (2015) addressing breaches in the fundamental rights of transgender people, among others requirements to undergo sterilization This supports reforms to enable the legal, political and social recognition of transgender individuals based on self-determination. It addresses forced sterilization of Intersex bodied people. It encourages countries to consider adopting third options on legal documents, enabling individuals to identify as non-binary (Resolution 2048:2015 Discrimination against transgender people in Europe).

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Healthcare

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- There are high levels of breaches of fundamental rights – including regarding healthcare e.g. In Norway prior to recent changes:

- Real Life Test based on gender binaried model

- Reluctance to undergo genital surgery may cause loss of the diagnosis

- Which implies losing access to any further publicly funded treatment.

- Diagnosis and GRS

- Which has citizenship repercussions:

It was really a hopeless situation. I could not rent a car, or get into my bank account; I had to wait with insurance, and could not go on vacation. I was really afraid of breaking a leg or being hospitalized during that time. I had no legal papers (trans women in her mid-40s)

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Shifting towards gender pluralist health – the Norwegian case

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- In 2015, the Norwegian Expert Committee addressed most trans citizenship claims:
- ✓ Recommending decentralisation of gender identity related health care services
- ✓ Ended forced sterilization
- ✓ Legislated for free and independent legal gender recognition
- ✓ More mechanisms for diverse range of trans people to influence policies

BUT did not legislate for third and other gender recognition, or for pronouns other than male/female ones

Conclusion

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- Gender pluralism enables people with a full range of gender identities to gain healthcare – it is centred on their wishes concerning gender
- BUT very challenging to medics who are invested in the gender binary system, and to medical hegemonies
- There is a need to address material aspects, including the institutional/political/financial investment in the status quo that exists
- And to expand the model to properly address SEX pluralism – so that the issues of Intersex people – most of whom are gender binaried – can be addressed

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